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## B-THEORY, FIXITY, AND FATALISM<sup>i</sup>

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### Introduction

One of the reasons that A-Theorists about time offer for rejecting the static B-Theory is that it cannot account for our experience of temporal becoming. They take this experience as evidence of a fundamental and objective feature of reality; and there has, of course, been a great deal of discussion and debate between A- and B-Theorists as to whether temporal experience really does provide such evidence. The abundance of discussion with respect to temporal becoming stands in contrast to another oft cited, though much less discussed, reason for rejecting the B-Theory, namely, its alleged implications for the common sense asymmetry between past and future. The B-Theory, in all of its different forms, not only postulates that time is static (as opposed to dynamic), but also that time is *ontologically* symmetrical: there is no ontological distinction between past and future. The A-Theoretic worry regarding this doctrine is that if the future participates in the same degree of existence as the past (and present), then how can the future be non-fixed and open? Or, more concretely, if the event of the Third World War exists eternally, then in what sense is that event—prior to its occurrence—not inexorable?<sup>ii</sup>

The A-Theorist's intuition is that there is no sense in which it is not inexorable; and so, in order to preserve the potentiality of the future, many philosophers of time have rejected the B-Theoretic doctrine of an existent future.<sup>iii</sup> Although this is a motivating factor for such philosophers, not much is said in the way of explaining or defending their belief that an existent future implies a fixed one. As

for the B-Theorist's part, she will simply claim that an existent future, though actual, is not necessary, and that therefore there is no worry about the future being fixed. The eternal existence of the Third World War simply implies that there *will* be a Third World War, not that there *necessarily* will be. Is this response all that is required to allay the concerns of the A-Theorist? Obviously the A-Theorist does not think so; but what should she say in her defense? In this paper, I will be considering arguments on both sides of the debate, in an attempt to get clear about the relationship between an existent future and a fixed one, and to determine whether the former does, indeed, imply the latter. One point of interest that will emerge from the debate is that this question, though often not discussed in any great detail, is closely related to, and hinges upon, the much more widely debated question of temporal becoming.

Before getting the debate underway, it will be necessary to discuss some of the key terms used in the debate, and their associated concepts. In particular, it will behoove us to get a grip on terms like ‘fixity’ and ‘fatalism’, and to derive an understanding of the relationship between the two concepts. This we will do in Section I. In Section II, we will look at some B-Theoretic arguments against the idea that an existent future is a fixed one, and from this discussion my position alongside the A-Theorist will emerge. In Section III, I will offer some additional arguments for that position, but will also consider how the B-Theorist might object, and will eventually conclude that the debate must end in an impasse. Finally, I will diagnose this impasse by making some concluding remarks about the asymmetry of fixity and its relation to temporal becoming—remarks that suggest that the former concept, as understood by the A-Theorist, is without application on a B-Theoretic conception of time.

## I. Terminology

#### A. ‘Fixity’

Most of us have a strong—if not altogether well defined—intuition that the past is fixed and the future is not. Our temporal experience is such that the past is determinate, unalterable, and inexorable—whereas the future is none of these things.

Taking this nebulous common sense intuition as our starting point, how should we characterize it philosophically? One fairly non-controversial characterization is that the past is (in some temporally relative sense) necessary, while the future is (in a corresponding sense) merely possible. This characterization has two virtues: it is sufficiently vague to avoid begging the question against the mainstream of analytic philosophers, yet it is also sufficiently intuitive to motivate the current project.

Unfortunately, however, I do not wish to endorse this modal characterization of the asymmetry. In fact, though I will not argue for it here, I think it is misleading and fundamentally inaccurate.<sup>iv</sup> Another candidate for characterizing the asymmetry can be derived from Aristotle’s act/potency distinction: the past is actual, while the future is merely potential.<sup>v</sup> Of course, Aristotle did not use this distinction to characterize temporal asymmetry. In fact, he thought that the present and past were both necessary, but we may borrow the distinction while applying it differently than did Aristotle.

Now, while I think the actuality/potentiality characterization of the asymmetry is also highly intuitive, it does suffer from being more controversial than the temporal necessity/possibility characterization. This is because many contemporary philosophers, namely, those who endorse a B-Theory of time, think that events can only be actual *simpliciter*, not actual at (or as of) a time. In other words, these philosophers (the B-Theorists) think that all events that have occurred, are occurring, and will occur are actual. Whereas, according to the actuality/potentiality

characterization of the asymmetry, events are *actualized* or *become actual* at a time. So, if I argue in this paper that the B-Theory cannot account for the asymmetry of fixity, and I assume from the outset that the latter is characterized in terms of an actuality/potentiality asymmetry, then I will not have achieved much, since the B-Theorists do not embrace such an asymmetry. For this reason, I will allow the modal characterization (i.e. in terms of temporal necessity/possibility) for the time being, even though the discussion in Sections II and III may eventually lead us away from this characterization.

So an initial characterization of the asymmetry of fixity is that the past is actual and the future is potential, UNLESS you are a B-Theorist; then it is that the past is (in some temporally relative sense) necessary, while the future is (in a corresponding sense) merely possible.<sup>vi</sup> In what follows, then, I will characterize fixity and non-fixity disjunctively as ‘actuality (or temporal necessity)’ and ‘potentiality (or temporal possibility)’, respectively, allowing the reader to choose which of the two characterizations they prefer. Whichever one prefers, the common sense idea that both characterizations are meant to capture is that the past is over and done with, and so inexorable, in a way that the future is not. This disjunctive characterization should serve to get us started, but I should also say, here, a little bit more about what I do *not* mean by ‘fixity’. I am keen to distinguish the concept of a fixed event from what I take to be other distinct—though possibly related—concepts; namely, those of a causally determined event and a fated event.

With respect to causal determinism, there does not seem to be any necessary connection between a future that is actual (or temporally necessary), and one that is causally determined. Nor does it necessarily follow from the future’s being potential (or temporally possible) that it is *not* causally determined. In making these claims at

this stage, of course, I am relying upon the vagueness of my initial characterization of fixity. Determinism is the doctrine that a complete description of the state of the world at any time, could, in principle, be derived from i) a complete description of the state of the world at any other time, *and* ii) a specification of the laws of nature.

Clearly this is *not* a vague doctrine, and so it should come as no surprise that—absent some substantive argumentation—it cannot be immediately inferred from the fixity of the future (as I have thus far characterized it), nor that its denial cannot be immediately inferred from the non-fixity of the future (as I have thus far characterized it).<sup>vii</sup> Perhaps if determinism is incompatible with free will, then there might be a stronger connection between a fixed event and a causally determined one, but I will not be investigating that possibility in this paper. Nevertheless, I stand by the claim that the fixity and the non-fixity of the future are distinct from the doctrines of causal determinism and indeterminism (respectively), and will be treating them as such from the outset. As a matter of fact, I will not be saying much at all about causal determinism, except to reiterate and bolster the claim that the concept of a causally determined event is distinct from the concept of a fixed event.

With respect to fatalism, the distinction between it and the fixity of the future seems not to be so crisp and clear as it is in the determinism case. Although there are several different varieties of fatalism, I take it that the claim they share in common is the denial of human freedom. The reason that fatalism and a fixed future are often identified with one another, is that there tends to be a very strong common sense intuition that a denial of the potentiality (or temporal possibility) of the future *implies* a denial of human freedom. But even if this intuition is correct, the doctrines of fatalism and the fixity of the future *are* distinct. Fatalism is, by definition, an agent centered doctrine. The intuition about the asymmetry of fixity, however, is not, *as*

*such*, an intuition about human agency, it is an intuition about the nature of events in time. If the intuition is correct, then events are not fixed before they occur; rather, they become fixed when (or after) they occur. It is an altogether different—though perhaps related—question, whether the fixity/non-fixity of *events* has any implications for the agency of *human beings*. I take it, for example, that if the future is fixed, then it would be fixed regardless of whether or not human beings existed. Perhaps this claim is not in keeping with the common sense origin of the intuition, given that common sense rarely considers what the world would be like without human beings. Still, the claim is, I think, a ramification of the intuition I am trying to elucidate. It, however, is *not* to claim that the following counterfactual might not be true of a world in which the future is fixed and there are no human beings (or any other agents): if there had existed agents, then fatalism would have obtained. But the truth of this counterfactual will depend upon different specifications of ‘fixity’ and ‘fatalism’.<sup>viii</sup> Again, I am not denying that the doctrines of the fixity/non-fixity of the future, determinism/indeterminism, and fatalism/free will might be related, but am simply claiming that they are all distinct doctrines.

### *B. ‘Fatalism’*

Thus far I have offered an initial characterization of what I think fixity is, and have distinguished it from what I think it is not: a fixed event is neither equivalent to a causally determined event nor to a fated one. And, as I said, I will not be dealing much more with causal determinism and any relationship it might have with a fixed future—it is not my focus here. But the relationship between a fixed future and fatalism strikes me as being a more intimate one, and it does play a central role in this paper. In order to motivate this role, I first need to say more about fatalism and what I take to be its different forms. The description and taxonomy that follow are my own,

and represent only one way of delineating the different forms. This way will no doubt prove objectionable to some; but providing it at this stage will clarify my usage of terms, and help guide the reader through my subsequent arguments.

So, how should we understand an assertion of fatalism? One helpful way to understand it is by analogy with the past. Most of us accept fatalism about the past—‘there is no point in crying over spilt milk’. We don’t think there is any point in deliberating about what we did yesterday, at least not with respect to forming intentions for acting. But we do deliberate about the future, because we often think that we have some power (albeit limited) over the way the future goes—a power that we take ourselves to lack with respect to the past. So, if fatalism obtains, then just as human beings lack power over the past, they also lack power over the future.

But how should this lack of power be spelled out, and what is its source? Answers to these two questions will yield two different ways, respectively, of categorizing fatalism (see Figure 1, p. 11). Answers to the latter question (call it the ‘source’ question) provide us with at least three broad categories of fatalism: logical, ontological, and theological.<sup>ix</sup> Logical fatalism, probably the most commonly discussed of the three, claims that the source of our lack of power over the future is the *logic* of future directed *propositions*. The timeless application of the laws of logic to all propositions demands that even future directed propositions admit of determinate truth values, and, given that we do not have the power to *change* the truth values of propositions, we do not have power over the future. We can further divide this category of fatalism if we offer more specific answers to the source question. We can either claim that it is the *present* truth of future directed propositions that yields logical fatalism, or that it is the temporal necessity of *past* truth about the future that is

the source. Call the former the argument from antecedent truth value, and the latter the argument from temporal necessity.<sup>x</sup>

The second category of fatalism, what I refer to as ‘ontological’ fatalism, is, as far as I am aware, not one that has been distinctly articulated in the literature. Its inclusion in the taxonomy is, therefore, more stipulative on my behalf. Nevertheless, I believe it is an option that must be countenanced in light of the current investigation. This is because the answer this category provides to the source question is that it is the *ontology* of future *events* that nullifies human freedom; perhaps because such events are causally determined (assuming incompatibilism), or, more relevant to us here, perhaps because they exist eternally. The thought here is that ontological fatalism is meant to follow *directly* from the nature of future events, and that this implication is independent of any implications arising from the status of propositions about those events. Thus, when we are considering whether an eternally existing future implies fatalism, it will be the ontological category that we are dealing with. I am aware, of course, that the bifurcation between propositions and events that supports the distinction between logical and ontological fatalism will seem unnatural to some, but if the reader will indulge me for the time being, I will attempt to motivate such a bifurcation in Section III.

As for theological fatalism, it answers the source question by claiming that it is an omniscient God’s *knowledge* of the future that nullifies human freedom. It is interesting to note that this is a unique category of fatalism, in that it can come in the form of either of the other two categories. That is, one might claim that God’s omniscient knowledge of the future is propositional (as in logical fatalism), or one might claim that God’s knowledge of the future is perceptual, or perhaps causally deterministic. In the perceptual case, we would think of God actually seeing future

events; whereas, in the deterministic case, we might think of him as knowing the causally determined future based on his own divine intentions. In either of these latter cases, the supposed fatalistic implications can be thought of as taking the form of an ontological fatalism. For these reasons, it might seem more appropriate to delete the category of theological fatalism, and simply add it as an additional subdivision of the other two categories. Nevertheless, inasmuch as the viability of theological fatalism depends upon the existence of an omniscient God, it is a special case and (I think) deserving of its own category, even if the distinction with the other two categories is not hard and fast.

The other question we asked, above, was how the lack of power over the future was to be spelled out. Essentially, this question is asking for the *object* of our lack of power—what is it that we lack power over when fatalism obtains (call this the ‘object’ question)? There are at least two different ways of answering the object question, and these answers will yield a different means of categorizing fatalism than that provided by the source question. The first answer is that we lack the power to *cause* future events—our actions are causally inefficacious. For example, though I am free to choose to take shelter during an air raid, if I am fated to be killed, then my taking shelter will not cause me to survive. Thus, there is no point in even deliberating about what actions to choose. This type of reasoning is often called the Lazy Argument. The other answer—what I will call the traditional answer—to the object question is that I lack power over my actions themselves. For example, if I, as a hypothetical Naval Commander, give the order for a naval battle, the battle will occur. But if the battle was fated to occur, then I was unable to exercise autonomy in giving the order. So, my actions are causally efficacious, but they are not freely willed.<sup>xi</sup>

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FIG. 1 (SEPARATE FILE).

### C. The Relationship between Fixity and Fatalism

Given this taxonomy of fatalism, then, and given that I take the fixity of the future to be distinct from fatalism, in what way do I take the two doctrines to be related? One fairly obvious answer is that, *given* the existence of agents, a fixed future implies fatalism, but is not a consequence of it. The reason a fixed future would not be a consequence of fatalism is that the domain of events associated with the latter is much more restricted than in the case of a fixed future: fatalism is only a doctrine about events involving agents. So, according to this answer, if all future events are fixed, then human beings lack freedom; but if fatalism obtains, then from this we can only infer that future events *involving human beings* are fixed, not that all future events are fixed.

Unfortunately, however, this characterization of the relationship between a fixed future and a fated one is an oversimplification. In the first place, it does not take into account the range of possibilities with respect to different categories of fatalism. For example, if the type of fatalism that is meant to follow from the Lazy Argument obtains, then even some human involving events would not be fixed, since the argument assumes that we can make our own choices. More importantly, though, the above characterization of the relationship also fails to take into account different specifications of fixity. One can conceive of a range of possible metaphysical grounds for the asymmetry of fixity, and these different grounds for the asymmetry are not only going to result in different specifications of it, but also in different ways in which fixity might be related to the different categories of fatalism. And, of these different ways, it might be that some prove more plausible relationships than others.

Consider, for example, the causal deterministic variety of fatalism: if fixity is grounded in ontology (according to which a fixed event is one that exists), then the fixity of the future would not only fail to be a consequence of the causal deterministic variety of fatalism, but it would also not imply it. This is because we can conceive of a future that, though (causally) deterministically related to the present/past, does not exist; just as we can conceive of an existent future that is nonetheless (causally) *indeterministically* related to the present/past (surely it is not a necessary condition for an existent future that it be related to the present and past in the way specified by causal determinism). On the other hand, if fixity is grounded not in ontology, but in causation, whereby the unidirectionality of causation *determines* the asymmetry of fixity; then it would appear that a fixed future and the causal deterministic variety of fatalism not only lack a conditional relationship, but that they are actually not compossible. This is because, on such a view, the potentiality (or temporal possibility) of the future would be assured by the same causal laws that are supposed to yield causal determinism (and thus, *ex hypothesi*, fatalism).

If, however, we are considering the variety of ontological fatalism that is meant to follow from a temporal eternalism (whereby all events exist eternally), *and* fixity is grounded in ontology, then it is plausible that that the fixity of the future both implies, *and* is a consequence of, (this variety of) fatalism. In such a case, an existent future would be the source (ground) both for the fixity of the future, and for ontological fatalism. This is an important point, and some of the A-Theorist's arguments in Sections II and III will be relying upon it; so I had better say a bit more about how we arrived at it. First, we began with the intuition that the past is fixed and

the future is not. We then went on to consider to what extent an assertion of fatalism might constitute a denial of this intuition; that is, we went on to consider how a fixed future and a fated one might be related. We then saw that the answer to this question hinges upon i) the *type* of fatalism under consideration, and ii) what we take to be the metaphysical *ground* of fixity. And the point I am making here is that, when we consider the *ontological* fatalism that is meant to follow from the eternal existence of all events (including future ones), then, plausibly, what we are considering is the possibility that fixity is grounded in ontology. And, further, when we consider whether fixity *is* grounded in ontology, then what we are considering is whether an ontological fatalism of this type obtains. Of course, the plausibility of these claims rests upon a further premise, but it is one that is not only plausible, but highly probable; namely, that if some future events exist (such as those involving humans), then all future events exist.

What about logical fatalism? Here, regardless of which variety of logical fatalism we are considering, the specification of the metaphysical ground of fixity seems not to be relevant, for precisely the same reason that logical fatalism is supposed to be a worry: because the laws of logic are thought to be independent of temporal considerations like the asymmetry of fixity. That is to say, the logical fatalist infers that the future is just as inexorable as the past, given that truth about the future is just as determinate as truth about the past. So, logical fatalism tells us that humans lack freedom *because* of the laws of logic and *independently* of whatever grounds fixity. Thus, regardless of whether we take fixity to be grounded in ontology or causation, and regardless of whether such grounds, by themselves, support an

asymmetry of fixity; if the logical fatalist's argument goes through, and the laws of logic do nullify human freedom, then it is likely that they also determine that *all* future events are fixed. Here too, then, we would also be confronted with the possibility that the fixity of the future and fatalism imply one another.

Of course, it is yet to be established that fatalism follows intelligibly from *any* of these purported sources. The taxonomy merely presents them as options. The option I will be concerned with for the remainder of *this* paper is *ontological* fatalism (of the eternalistic variety), and we will see to what extent it is a *viable* option as we proceed. What I want to establish at this point is that, generally, in some cases it is plausible that there is an intimate relationship between a fixed future and fatalism, even though the two doctrines are distinct; and, specifically, that this intimacy obtains in the case of eternalistic ontological fatalism. Therefore, in what follows, I will speak of a fixed future both in terms of itself, as well as in terms of any fatalistic implications it might have, implicitly acknowledging both the distinction, as well as the relationship, between the two concepts.

## II. The B-Theorist's Arguments

With those terminological preliminaries out of the way, we are now in a position to commence the debate. We begin with a discussion of the B-Theoretic arguments against the idea that an existent future is a fixed one, making reference to the works of (Smart 1981) and (Mellor 1998).

### A. Smart

Most of Smart's arguments against the unreality of the future focus on issues arising from special relativity and reference to future individuals. According to Smart,

special relativity has shown us that one man's future could, theoretically, be another man's past; and so if we believe existence to be an absolute, the idea of a non-existent future is incoherent.<sup>xii</sup> Furthermore, arguments which claim that since we cannot refer to future individuals, they must not exist, are merely confusing ontology and epistemology. But, of course, here we are concerned neither with the scientific, nor with the epistemological, ramifications of an existent future; rather, we are concerned with the *modal* ramifications (according to the characterization of fixity I am offering the B-Theorist). And Smart does briefly consider this aspect of the question, though he only devotes a single paragraph to it. Nevertheless, it will be of benefit to briefly mention what he has to say.

He considers whether the opponent of an existent future might not be motivated by considerations of free choice and the ability to alter the future. But, as Smart rightly points out, if one tries to alter the future by doing *A* rather than doing *B*, then *A* just *is* the future—nothing whatsoever has been altered. So we should not speak of altering the future any more than we would speak of altering the past. But then Smart says that ‘There are no alternative futures just as there are no alternative pasts’ (Smart 1981, 149). Notice the shift here from what is alterable to what has alternatives. Surely there is room to deny the former while affirming the latter with respect to the future? That is to say, whatever way things go, certainly they will go that way, but presently there is still a number of *alternative* ways things *might* go. Nor is this to confuse ontology and epistemology, as Smart claims. One’s belief in the temporal possibility of the future need have nothing to do with one’s lack of certainty about the future. Of course, it seems straight forward that a non-existent

future is not knowable; but if Smart does not see this epistemological point as providing evidence for the unreality of the future, then we need not cite it as such. Surely it is enough to cite the possibility of prevention, such that if the preventive factor had not been present, a different possible future would have occurred. Smart also says that even if there were alternative futures, this would point to a ‘multiplicity of futures, not … an unreal future’ (Smart, 149). But the nihilist about the future believes that the existence of future possibilities is merely an abstract existence, and so is not forced to choose between the concrete existence of one actual future (Smart’s view), and the concrete existence of a multiplicity of futures (as in McCall’s model (McCall 1994)). In the same manner, the modal actualist can admit that there are possibilities without being forced to adopt an extreme modal realism.

Given Smart’s denial that there are alternative futures, perhaps he is not the sort of B-Theorist that we should look to in our investigation. We are trying to discover whether the common sense idea that the future is non-fixed, not inexorable, and replete with (abstract) possibilities is sustainable on a view of time according to which the actual future exists. One almost senses that Smart does not share this common sense idea, or at least that he is indifferent regarding it. So let’s move on to Mellor, a B-Theorist who does seem to take the asymmetry of fixity seriously, and who, nevertheless, sees no conflict between this asymmetry and the B-Theory of time.

#### *B. Mellor*

Mellor acknowledges that while at any present moment there are ‘many possible futures, there is only one possible past, the actual one’ (Mellor 1998, 20). Of course, he does not actually believe that there is such a thing as the present, since the present

moment is an A-moment, and he thinks only B-moments exist. So at any *B*-moment, say, 5 PM on January 16, 2004, it is true that there are many possible futures (relative to that B-moment), but only one past (relative to that B-moment). In the same breath, however, Mellor wishes to maintain that at that B-moment there is only one *actual* future, ‘containing all and only the B-facts that will eventually be first present and then past’ (Mellor, 20). So ‘B-possibilities’ vary over time, even though B-facts do not. Are these claims consistent? Mellor thinks so. This is because, for him, the future’s being non-fixed and the past’s being fixed<sup>xiii</sup> are not constituted by an asymmetry of ontology, rather they are constituted by the unidirectionality of causation (Mellor, 35). The latter is what determines both the direction of time and the modal asymmetry between past and future events. Mellor is quick to point out that this asymmetry does not depend upon, or hold between, events that actually instantiate pastness and futurity; rather, it simply depends upon whether, at any B-moment  $t$ , events are earlier or later than  $t$  (Mellor, 35). If they are earlier, then at  $t$  they are fixed, if later, then at  $t$  they are non-fixed.

Setting aside, for the moment, the claim that the asymmetry of fixity is constituted by the unidirectionality of causation, what should we make of Mellor’s other claims? He believes it is consistent to claim that at  $t$  all events later than  $t$  are actual and existent, even though there also exist at  $t$  possible alternatives to those actual future events. But if there is only one series of actual events, and these exist eternally and tenselessly, then in what sense can there be other possibilities as of *any* time  $t$ ? Consider two events,  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ , which occur at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , respectively. Regardless of where (when?) one’s current temporal experience is located on the

timeline,  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  eternally exist and occur at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ . Suppose that  $t_3$  is present, then clearly there is no sense in which  $E_2$  could (at  $t_3$ ) fail to occur at  $t_2$ . It already has occurred! But what if  $t_1$  is present, how is it now the case that it is possible that  $E_2$  not occur at  $t_2$ ? Nothing has changed! Our location on the timeline does not change the ontology of events in time. That ontology, according to the B-Theorist, is perfectly symmetrical with respect to past and future (or with respect to earlier than/later than the present moment).

Perhaps Mellor would claim that I am confusing actuality with necessity. The future is actual, but this does not mean that it is necessary. This reply would force me to acknowledge that at  $t_1$  it is, in *some* sense, possible that  $E_2$  not occur at  $t_2$ . But it seems to me that the sense in which it is possible fails to do justice to our intuition that the future is non-fixed. It is only possible in the sense that there is some possible world in which the series of events in time is fixed differently. And all this means is that in the actual world, though the future is not fixed *necessarily*, it is fixed contingently.<sup>xiv, xv</sup> The past is also thus contingently fixed, and yet this fact does not give us any comfort when we find ourselves regretting a past event. It is not as if someone could console us by saying, ‘Just because the past is actual, doesn’t mean it is necessary. Things *might* have gone differently.’ The appropriate reply would be, ‘But they didn’t! And the occurrence of that event is now inexorable.’ So, too, at  $t_1$   $E_2$ ’s occurrence at  $t_2$  is inexorable, *even if* there is a possible world in which  $E_2$  does not occur at  $t_2$ ; since, in this world,  $E_2$  is eternally at  $t_2$ .

Although I believe the foregoing considerations cast doubt on Mellor’s ability to reconcile an actual and real future with a non-fixed one, they are by no means

conclusive. In the next section I will expand on them as well as consider possible B-Theoretic objections. In the mean time, this is a natural point at which to return to Mellor's claim that the asymmetry of fixity is grounded in the unidirectionality of causation; since it is on the basis of this claim that Mellor thinks an actual future is possible in a way that the actual past is not. The idea is that even though there is no ontological difference between past and future events, there is an asymmetry in the direction of causation (from earlier to later), and *this* asymmetry results in a fixed past and non-fixed future (Mellor, 35). I have argued elsewhere that the *presentist's* attempt to ground the asymmetry of fixity in the unidirectionality of causation cannot succeed.<sup>xvi</sup> But the arguments I rely upon in that context assume an A-Theoretic account of causation—one according to which the direction of causation is grounded in the direction of time and objective temporal becoming. Clearly, however, arguments based on this account would not carry any weight against Mellor, since his account of causation is obviously *not* an A-Theoretic one. According to Mellor, causal order determines temporal order, not the other way around (Mellor, 106-8); so causation is the most fundamental aspect of time, not—for obvious reasons—temporal becoming. Nevertheless, in the present context, I am happy to allow Mellor's views regarding the nature of causation; for if I can shed doubt, even upon these grounds, on his ability to account for the asymmetry of fixity, then so much the worse for the grounds.

One reason for dissatisfaction with Mellor's attempt to base the asymmetry of fixity on the fact that causes temporally precede their effects, is that it is not clear that that fact isn't a mere manifestation of the asymmetry in question, as opposed to a

determinant of it. For Mellor, at any B-moment  $t$ , all events earlier than  $t$  are fixed, and some events later than  $t$  are non-fixed; and this is because nothing at or later than  $t$  could be a cause of anything earlier than  $t$ , whereas many things at or earlier than  $t$  can be causes of things later than  $t$  (Mellor, 35). But this is simply an observation about the nature of causation, and in no way explains what makes the past fixed and future non-fixed. There is, of course, a sense in which this objection is unfair, since it seems to demand of the B-Theorist something she cannot offer; namely, an explanation of how past events acquire the property of fixity. This is unfair because B-Theorists do not think past events have any special properties in virtue of which they are past—all events are ontologically on a par. In spite of the unfairness of this demand, however, it is a natural one to make if one endorses a robust asymmetry of fixity. And once this point is acknowledged, one begins to wonder whether A-Theorists and B-Theorists are really agreeing, rather than equivocating, when they both affirm the non-fixity of the future. We will return to this point later in the conclusion.

Another reason for disputing Mellor's account, is that he has not shown that an event that can be causally effected might not also be a fixed one. Consider an example from fatalism. Suppose that I am able, at  $t_1$ , to cause  $E_2$  to occur at  $t_2$ . The fact that I am able to do so, but am unable, at  $t_2$ , to cause  $E_1$  not to have occurred at  $t_1$ , in no way implies that I was able, at  $t_1$ , to *avoid* causing  $E_2$  to occur at  $t_2$ . In short, it is perfectly conceivable that events which we are able to causally effect might, nevertheless, be fixed; since the intention to cause such events might be every bit as fixed as the effects themselves. In connection with this point, recall from Section I

the distinction between the Lazy Argument for fatalism and the traditional version. Here, in making the point that the unidirectionality of causation does not rule out fatalism, I am appealing to the latter. That is, I am *not* appealing to the argument that says, for example, ‘Since it is fated that you will either be killed or not be killed tomorrow, there is no point in taking precautions against being killed’; because this argument implies that our actions—though freely willed—are not efficacious. I am, rather, appealing to the argument that says, ‘Though your actions affect the future, they (the actions) are fated and so are not performed with autonomy.’ According to this version of fatalism, the effects of our future actions are fated not because of a breakdown in the causal process, but because that process itself—beginning with our deliberations and volitions, and ending with our actions and their effects—is fated. Thus, as long as I can get the B-Theorist to acknowledge the *possibility* of this type of fatalism, *then* my point—that an event caused by an agent might nevertheless be a fixed one—follows. If these arguments have any merit, then the mere fact that causes precede their effects cannot constitute the asymmetry of fixity; in which case, the B-Theorist cannot appeal to this fact in trying to account for the temporal possibility of the future.

So my line of argument against Mellor and the B-Theorist is to claim that a real and actual future does threaten to undermine the asymmetry of fixity, and that the unidirectionality of causation does not entail otherwise. Again, however, I wish to stress that these considerations are merely suggestive, and that they will need to be reinforced in the next section.

### III. Some A-Theoretic Arguments—and an Impasse

In the last section, I suggested that there are several considerations that favour the A-Theorist's belief that an existent future is a fixed one, but that these by no means conclusively demonstrate this. To recapitulate briefly, those considerations involved the following three claims: First, the A-Theorist can acknowledge that the future will be what it will be, and that we certainly cannot *alter* the future; while still maintaining that there are alternative possible futures that, nonetheless, do not exist concretely. Second, the only sense in which an actual future can also admit of alternative possible futures is a trivial one; since, if the future is actual but not necessary, then—though not necessarily fixed—it is still contingently fixed, and how is contingent fixity any less counter-intuitive than necessary fixity? And, finally, the B-Theorist's appeal to the direction of causation cannot insulate an actual future from the claim that it is a fixed one, since it is not clear that a future effect is any less fixed than a past or present cause. So how can we reinforce these considerations with more conclusive arguments? In this section I will offer two arguments that purport to show in a non-circular way that the fixity of the future follows directly from its existence. I will also, however, consider forceful B-Theoretic objections to these arguments, and these will leave us in the rather unsatisfactory position of an impasse. I will conclude with some comments on the conceptual relation between fixity and temporal becoming—ones that will suggest a diagnosis of the impasse.

#### *A. The Road Analogy*

The first argument I will consider adapts an analogy suggested by (Lewis 1986, 202-3).<sup>xvii</sup> Lewis, in trying to explain the concept of a temporal part, says it is like a part of a long road cut crosswise. Although the road may pass through Village A and

Village B, some of its crosswise parts are only in A, others only in B, and many others in neither. So, too, according to Lewis, with objects spread out in time. Some of my temporal parts are located at the year 1969, others are located at the year 2004, but no temporal part of mine is wholly present at more than one time. This is the account of persistence known as perdurance, according to which objects persist by having different temporal parts at different times. Given the B-Theorist's emphasis on the static nature of time, one can see how she might be fond of such spatial analogies. Let's adapt this road analogy in such a way that it offers a picture of the B-Theoretic timeline of static events and our subjective experience of 'moving' along it.

Suppose I am moving along the road from Village A to Village C, which runs via Village B, and my current location is Village B. This description of my spatial location does not imply that Village C, or indeed Village A, are any less real than Village B. On the total spatial picture, my location along the road has no bearing on the ontology of the places that lie along it. The fact that I am 'here' in Village B does not say anything about Village B. 'Here' is just an indexical that derives its meaning from the context of utterance. So, too, according to the B-Theorist, there is nothing objectively special about one's subjective temporal location. 'Now' is just an indexical, and does not pick out any special property instantiated by the time at which I utter it. World War Three (if actual *simpliciter*) is just as real as my writing of this paper, as is World War Two. For the B-Theorist, a maximal description of existence includes all times along the one dimensional timeline, just as anyone would agree that it includes all places in three dimensional space.

But now consider the repercussions of the road analogy with respect to fixity, and specifically, with respect to fatalism. If the future is non-fixed, then we have at least a limited power over how things go for us in the future. According to the road analogy, however, the road is an analogue for the one dimensional timeline, so there is no getting off the road, and its track is already laid—its destination unavoidable. Given this analogy, if I am currently located at Village B, how can it make any sense to say that I am able to avoid Village C? Here we must resist the temptation to think the term ‘Village C’ is merely a variable for a future time, so that the claim that I am unable to avoid Village C is as innocent and trivial as the claim that I am unable to avoid a future time  $t_f$ , where  $t_f$  is earlier than, or simultaneous with, my death. If the analogy is to maintain its consistency, ‘Village C’ must be a specific event located on the timeline (‘the road’) at a specific time (say, ‘mile marker 30’). If the event corresponding to ‘Village C’ is, for example, my brushing my teeth, then there is no possibility of declining to brush my teeth at the time denoted by ‘mile marker 30’.

The B-Theorist will no doubt reply in the same manner as we have already seen. She will say, ‘Of course it is true that you will pass through Village C at mile marker 30. But what is false, and what must be true if a fixed future follows from an existent future, is that *necessarily*, you will pass through Village C at mile marker 30. The road does not *have to* pass through Village C, it is perfectly possible that it pass through Village D instead. But that possibility is not actual. The actual road does indeed pass through Village C. So what?’ My reply to this line of reasoning is to agree that the road does not necessarily pass through Village C, but to disagree that such a necessity is, itself, a necessary condition for a fixed future. I can acknowledge

that there are some possible worlds in which the road does not pass through Village C, and still think that in this world Village C is inexorable, and so fixed. And, as I have already said, the metaphysical contingency of the fixity does not make it any less counterintuitive; for past contingent events are also thus contingently fixed, given that there are possible worlds in which they never occurred. And, again, this contingency does not give us any sense that we have a power over the past, or that the past is somehow not inexorable.

Given a B-Theoretic ontology, the parameters of the road analogy are such that, i) it is impossible to get off the road, ii) it is impossible to stop moving along it, iii) the road is not under construction, but is complete and cannot be destroyed, rerouted, etc., and iv) it *passes through Village C at mile marker 30*. Thus the existence of the road in its entirety, and the existence of Village C at a determinate location on that road, ensure that I cannot avoid passing through Village C, regardless of whether I choose to or not. The possibility of my avoiding Village C at mile marker 30 may exist in a world in which the road takes a different course, but there is nothing that I can choose to do that would make such a world accessible. So, too, given the tenseless existence of all events in history, the possibility that another history is the actual one is not one that I am capable of realizing, so the possibility of an alternate history containing an alternate future is not a possibility *for me*, as an agent who wills and acts in order to bring certain things about—any more than it is possible for me to bring about an alternate past.

Apart from objecting to my distinction between a necessary future and a fixed one, how else might the B-Theorist object to this argument? There are two further

objections I would like to consider. The first is to my adaptation of Lewis' road analogy. Smart distinguishes between two different senses of the word 'space', and argues that in one sense of that word we must not spatialize time, whereas, in the other, it is perfectly appropriate (Smart 1953 and 1955). The first sense of the word 'space' is that of ordinary language, according to which 'space is something that endures through time, and in which "space" has something of the logic of "thing" or "substance"' (Smart 1955, 241). The logic Smart is referring to here is that which allows for change and endurance through time. The second sense of the word 'space' is 'that in which we use the word in geometry, where we talk of two-, three-, four- or n-dimensional space, or in which we refer to the space-time of the Minkowski world as "a space"' (Smart, 241). According to the logic of three dimensional geometry, for example, things do not change or endure through time—in fact, they are timeless. And though in the logic of four dimensional geometry—when interpreted as a geometry of Minkowski space-time—time enters into the picture, change and endurance do not. In the geometry of the four dimensional Minkowski representation, 'thing' has the logic of a perduring space-time worm consisting of a series of instantaneous three dimensional cross-sections. According to such a logic, 'things' do not endure or change, they just *are*.

Now, according to Smart, it is perfectly acceptable to spatialize time in the latter sense of 'space', since this is precisely what we do in representing space and time as a Minkowski 'space'. Such a representation is free of any implications of, or commitments to, notions of change, endurance, passage, etc. But, Smart cautions, when we spatialize time in the ordinary language sense of 'space', then we do commit

ourselves to an erroneous conception of time according to which it endures. That is, we ‘think of time as an extended something along which we can move. For this to be so it would have to endure through a hyper-time’ (Smart, 241). Clearly, then, Smart would object to my use of Lewis’ road analogy; since Lewis was spatializing time in the four dimensional sense of ‘space’ (whereby the road depicts a perduring object with temporal parts), whereas I was spatializing time in the ordinary language sense of ‘space’ (whereby the analogy depicts time itself and our ‘moving’ along it). In fact, Smart even claims that it is the inappropriate spatialization of time that leads to the ‘metaphysical error … of consciousness crawling up world-lines’ (Smart, 240), and he would no doubt accuse me of committing the same error in my use of the road analogy.

My response to this objection has two parts. First, I will acknowledge that in my adaptation of Lewis’ road analogy, I am importing a notion of passage that is not part of the B-Theoretic ontology (though I did acknowledge the subjective nature of the ‘movement’). Nevertheless, that notion *is* part of our experience of time, and when we talk about the threat of fatalism and the fixity of the future, it is not clear that our *experience* of events in time does not provide evidence about the *nature* of events in time (i.e. whether they are fixed). At least, it is not clear that it is appropriate to discuss the threat of fatalism—given that it is an agent centered doctrine—without taking into account the human perspective. Perhaps it *is* an error to speak of ‘consciousness crawling up world-lines’, but I am not sure what the alternatives are on a B-Theoretic ontology. If one endorses a physicalist view of the mental (which Smart certainly does), then I suppose an individual’s consciousness at time  $t$  is just the

brain state of that individual's temporal part located at  $t$ . But does this mean we all have to be physicalists in order to make sense of consciousness on a B-Theoretic ontology? Regardless of what inferences we draw from it, our consciousness does *seem* to flow from one moment to the next, and this seeming is as much a part of reality as is the B-Theorist's future. If spatializing both aspects of reality helps us to visualize the human perspective in a B-Theoretic world, then perhaps a more heterogeneous logic than Smart allows is required for the word 'space'.

On the other hand, suppose we adjust my adaptation of the road analogy, so that the road is analogous to my entire space-time worm. So cross sections of the road would be analogous to my temporal parts. This is certainly in keeping with Lewis' original analogy, as well as with Smart's strictures concerning the spatialization of time. Besides making it a little more cumbersome, and a little less dramatic, does this adaptation change the substance of my argument? Now we are assuming that my 'present' temporal part is simultaneous and co-located with Village B (at, say mile marker 15), and that I have a later temporal part at mile marker 30 that is simultaneous and co-located with Village C. Well, what if my mile marker 15 temporal part does not want my mile marker 30 temporal part to be simultaneous and co-located with Village C? Then there does not seem to be anything  $I_{mm15}$  can do about it, even if there is a possible world in which  $I_{mm30}$  is (am?) not at Village C! Thus, excising subjective experience from the analogy does not seem to make the implications of an existent future any less counter-intuitive. What it does seem to show, however, is that absent the experience of passage, the notion of a fated, inexorable future that 'awaits' us doesn't even seem to have an application. The

reason the supposed free agent finds the doctrine of fatalism so abhorrent, is that it forces her to view the future as unfolding in a way that she is powerless to avoid. But as the adjusted road analogy shows, on a B-Theoretic ontology, nothing unfolds or awaits us, everything just *is*. It is difficult to make sense of an ‘impending fate’ on such an ontology. We will return to this point in the conclusion.

As for the second objection to my argument from the road analogy, most likely the B-Theorist will say that it is precisely my willing and acting that results in my passing through Village C at mile marker 30 (or the willing and acting of my mile marker 15 through mile marker 30 temporal parts). That is to say, as long as the causal process involved in my willing and acting results in my passing through Village C, then I am no less free than I would be if the future were non-existent. Pick a future event such as Susan’s going to Anstruther at a future time  $t_f$ . If one can trace back the causal chain from that event to Susan’s actions and volitions, then Susan goes to Anstruther of her own free will—regardless of the fact that the event of Susan’s going to Anstruther exists eternally. Consider that, assuming the impossibility of backwards causation, one cannot trace a causal chain from a past action, as effect, to a present volition, as cause, and it is obviously this point that encourages the B-Theorist to ground the asymmetry of fixity in the unidirectionality of causation.

#### *B. A Time Travel Story*

One way of illustrating the B-Theorist’s second objection to my argument from the road analogy is by reference to a time travel story. Suppose a time traveler from the future appears in front of you, hands you an envelope, and claims that the envelope

contains a description of a day in your life exactly two years from now. He knows because he spends that day with you, and has traveled back to conduct a little experiment. He urges you, in the spirit of cooperation with the experiment, not to open the envelope until the end of the day in question. You comply, and two years later, at the end of the day, you read an accurate description of most all that you say and do that day. Right down to your vocal expressions of how you feel throughout the day, and what you are thinking and deliberating about. Now, you would surely be surprised that there is someone who not only foreknew this, but someone who *fore-experienced* it; that is to say, not only did certain propositions about that event antecedently admit of determinate truth values, but the event in question antecedently had a concrete existence—at least antecedently to your conscious experience of it. In spite of this surprise, however, would the sense of free agency that accompanied your thoughts and actions throughout that day now seem diminished? Clearly, claims the B-Theorist, it would not. Regardless of the tenseless, eternal existence of the events of that day, your volitions led to your actions and to their effects, so those events and actions were not fixed or fated prior to their occurrence.

Suppose, however, that your time traveling friend wanted to repeat the experiment. He hands you another envelope, and says, ‘See you in two years’. But this time you are not feeling very cooperative, so you open the envelope and read the letter. *Now* will you feel as though your future is fixed? It seems, in this case, that you would. Perhaps you do everything you can to avoid being at the place and in the circumstances described in the letter. But as the appointed day draws nearer you realize that your very attempts to avoid fulfilling the ‘prophecy’ in the letter are,

instead, *leading* to its fulfillment. You have good reason to believe the details of the letter are true, so in what sense are you able to prove them false?

Lewis claims that this type of fatalistic argument confuses irrelevant facts about the future with relevant facts about the present (Lewis 1976). Suppose you are able to do some time traveling of your own, and you travel back to a time before your birth. According to your personal time, your birth is still in the past; but now according to external time, your birth is in the future.<sup>xviii</sup> Are you able to commit acts that contradict your knowledge of personally earlier but externally later events? According to Lewis, even if you know, based on your personal past, what the external future will be, this is a fact about times other than the present moment, and only facts about the present moment are relevant to whether you can presently act freely. Perhaps your present *belief* that you are unable to change history is a fact about the present, but this item of belief is compossible with your acting contrary to history. What is not compossible with your acting contrary to history is your knowledge of that history—but, again, this item of knowledge is not entirely about your present. So facts about the future are not facts that are relevant to what you can and cannot do, ‘in any ordinary sense’, as Lewis puts it (Lewis, 151). Thus we can have knowledge of propositions about the future, and—assuming the possibility of time travel—can even have first hand experience of concrete events that are now future; and we can have all this without the threat of fatalism, since facts about the future are only relevant to what we will do, not to what we are able to do.

One possible, and obvious, line of response to the B-Theorist’s objection here is to question the validity of her sense of free agency. Is the Lewisian ‘ordinary

sense' of being able to do something truly ordinary, or is it a far cry from the common sense notion of being free to do something? I do not, however, wish to pursue this line of response, since I think it lies too close to the incompatibilist's objection to the compatibilist's notion of free will; and, as I have said, I take the context of that debate to be distinct from the present context. Instead, as a response, I want to offer one final argument for the thesis that an existent future is a fixed one, before moving on to my concluding remarks.

Recall the distinction between logical and ontological fatalism that I outlined in Section I. The reader may have noticed that I have been relying on this distinction in my presentation of the time travel examples. Thus, I have been keen to stress that the examples not only involve antecedent truth and foreknowledge, but also antecedent existence and fore-experience. I stress this because the Lewisian response to the fatalistic argument, above, as well as many of the B-Theoretic responses to fatalism, seem only to count against *logical* fatalism. That is to say, they only explain away the fatalistic implications that supposedly follow from truth, or from knowledge, about the future. They ignore the point that in addition to there being eternal truths, or facts, about the future events in the examples, the events themselves have, in some sense, *occurred*. I say 'in some sense' because the B-Theorist will object to my use of the past tense 'occurred', rather than the tenseless 'occurs'. But even if you deny objective temporal becoming, you will still have to acknowledge that the time traveler in the first example has consciously experienced the events described in the letter. And so, for him, those events have occurred 'before' he hands you the letter.

So why is this point supposed to count against Lewis' response to the fatalist?

He says that knowledge of the future is not a fact (entirely) about the present. Only our present beliefs about the future are facts entirely about the present, and these are compossible with the future being other than what we believe it to be. What is the justification for the claim that facts not entirely about the present are not relevant to what we are able to do? One thought might be that such facts<sup>xix</sup> *could have been* different; and since our actions partially determine what those facts are, the latter must conform to the former, rather than the converse. The thought is simply that facts about the future cannot condition our ability to act, because such facts counterfactually depend upon our actions. So if it is true that you do not change history, or that you do not act contrary to what is described in the ‘prophetic’ letter, then this truth is a *result* of your actions, not a determinant of them. The truth about what you will do tomorrow is true because *you make it true.*<sup>xx</sup> Now, while I acknowledge the respectability of this response in the case of logical fatalism, I cannot see how it applies in the case of ontological fatalism—where the truths in question are about events that have, even if only for some individuals, already occurred.

Perhaps I can better illustrate this point by reference, again, to the road analogy. The *logical* fatalist will argue that the truth of the proposition, ‘You will pass through Village C at mile marker 30’, fixes the corresponding event. The proper anti-fatalistic response to this is to say that the truth of the proposition does not fix the event, rather, the future occurrence of the event fixes the truth value of the proposition. So, if I don’t pass through Village C at mile marker 30, then it’s not that

a once true proposition has been made false, but simply that that proposition had always been false. Thus the truth values of propositions about the future counterfactually depend upon the future occurrence of their corresponding events. But here we are speaking of counterfactual dependence of the truth values of propositions, i.e. properties of abstract entities, on events that have not yet occurred. According to the road analogy, however, we have not only abstract future truth, but concrete future *existence*. So, the response to the *ontological* fatalist cannot rely upon counterfactual claims, but must rely upon counter-*existence* claims: something along the lines of, ‘If I don’t pass through Village C, then it doesn’t lie along my route.’ But what nonsense is this? There it is, right there on the map, it does lie upon my route! If a future event  $E_f$  exists, then it is simply a contradiction to suggest that  $E_f$ ’s counterfactual non-existence secures the non-fixity of the future, since  $E_f$  does exist. The point is, although the abstract truth about the future may counterfactually depend upon my actions, what has concretely come into existence cannot be other than what it is, and thus the response to the logical fatalist loses its force in the context of *ontological* fatalism.

### Conclusion

So where do the arguments of Section III leave us? Although I ended that section with a final argument against the B-Theorist, it seems one can always anticipate a B-Theoretic response. In this case, the B-Theorist is probably going to say that my appeal to ‘what has come into existence’ is one that presupposes a dynamic conception of time, and so cannot be used to show that a static conception of time implies a fixed future. The B-Theorist denies that *anything* ‘comes into existence’—

at least in the sense intended by the A-Theorist. For the B-Theorist, the sum total of existence is not temporally relative; and although that sum total is fully determinate and static, it is not necessary, and so might have consisted of different entities. From there the dialectic will continue much as it has done. Is there any end to this impasse? Perhaps not, but I think a diagnosis of the impasse can be found precisely in the B-Theorist's denial of temporal becoming.

Although the majority of both A-Theorists and B-Theorists believe that the past is fixed and the future is not, we have seen that the sense in which they intend this asymmetry is very different. For the A-Theorist, it is a robust one, according to which there is an *objective* potency about the future, as contrasted with the present and the past. This is most often cashed out in terms of a non-existent/non-actual future, whereby the ontological status of what was once the future changes, or becomes something else, in the present. It is this objective temporal becoming of the future in the present that imparts to the A-Theorist's notion of temporal asymmetry its robustness. Thus objective temporal becoming is constitutive of the A-Theorist's conception of the asymmetry of fixity. Contrast this with the B-Theorist's notion of the asymmetry, and we find a much more limited sense in which the future differs from the present and the past. As we saw in Section II.B. with Mellor's account, it is not an ontological difference, but merely a modal difference: all events on the timeline are actual, but future events are not temporally necessary in the way that present and past events are. For the A-Theorist, however, the modal difference between the future and the past can only obtain if there is an ontological difference—

for an event to be actual, *just is* for it to be temporally necessary. This view arises directly out of a belief in objective temporal becoming.

Given this distinction between the A- and B-Theoretic conceptions of the asymmetry of fixity, it should come as no surprise that the two antagonists are unable to come to an agreement on whether the B-Theory implies a fixed future: they are talking past one another. While this latter point is certainly not surprising, perhaps the diagnosis of the disagreement about temporal becoming as the source of the misunderstanding is. For the A-Theorist, events become fixed as time objectively passes, i.e. as they come into existence; and this is why it is so difficult for her to conceive of existent events that are not fixed. So in evaluating the B-Theorist's position, the A-Theorist is smuggling in the A-Theoretic notion of temporal becoming, a notion that is simply without application on a static, ontologically symmetrical conception of time. As we have seen, this is particularly clear when the A-Theorist argues that an existent future implies ontological fatalism, since that argument depends upon the robust conception of fixity for its application. That is to say, the A-Theorist is only able to articulate the threat of ontological fatalism in language that assumes temporal becoming and passage.

Do these observations, then, vindicate the B-Theorist? To a certain extent, yes. We have seen that the two antagonists are working with different conceptions of the asymmetry of fixity, and that this difference is based, on the one hand, on an affirmation of temporal becoming, and on the other, a rejection of it. So the A-Theorist can only claim that a B-Theoretic ontology implies a fixed future in her robust sense of the term, and this will do little to ruffle the B-Theorist's feathers, since

she does not acknowledge that sense. By parallel reasoning, however, these observations will not convince the A-Theorist to embrace the B-Theoretic notion of the asymmetry of fixity, since that would involve the denial of temporal becoming, and an A-Theory without temporal becoming would be no A-Theory at all.

So my conclusions are twofold. First, I conclude that there is an impasse between the A-Theorist and B-Theorist as to whether an existent future implies a fixed future, and that this impasse is merely a reflection of the impasse between them on temporal becoming. And, second, I conclude that the concept of ontological fatalism is most likely a vacuous one; since it only has application in the light of objective temporal becoming, and, on many views, an assertion of temporal becoming entails the *non*-existence of the future (thus ruling out ontological fatalism by definition).<sup>xxi</sup>

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<sup>ii</sup> The eternal existence of events on a B-Theoretic ontology should not be interpreted as timeless existence (i.e. existing outside of time), nor as sempiternal existence (i.e. existing at all times); rather, it is tenseless existence *at* a particular time. Thanks to L. Nathan Oaklander for pointing out the need for this clarification.

<sup>iii</sup> A-Theorist's who deny the existence of the future, at least partially on the basis of concerns about the open future, include (Adams 1986), (Lucas 1986), (Prior 1968, 26-44, 59-77 and 1998, 104-7), and Tooley 1997, 43-8) (Tooley would probably not characterize himself as an A-Theorist, but, inasmuch as his conception is a dynamic one, it is also an A-Theoretic one).

<sup>iv</sup> See (Diekemper 2004).

<sup>v</sup> This seems to be Ockham's characterization of the asymmetry, see (Adams and Kretzmann 1969, Introduction), and (Zagzebski 1991: 18). Though Ockham also attributed an 'accidental' necessity to the past.

<sup>vi</sup> I do not wish to imply that the modal characterization is necessarily a 'B-Theoretic' one, nor that my preferred characterization is necessarily an 'A-Theoretic' one. Mellor, at least, is a B-Theorist who endorses the modal characterization of the asymmetry (see Section II.B., below). But many other B-Theorists are loath to acknowledge any 'common sense' asymmetry whatsoever. Similarly, there are many A-Theorists who actually prefer the modal characterization—I just happen not to be one of them.

<sup>vii</sup> Of course, if one characterizes a non-fixed future in terms of a contingent future, where 'contingent' is read as 'not necessitated by the state of the world plus the laws of nature', then, trivially, a non-fixed future implies indeterminism. But it is precisely this characterization that I wish to avoid.

<sup>viii</sup> See Section I.C., below.

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<sup>ix</sup> By ‘source’, here, I simply mean the idea or principle from which fatalism has seemed (or might seem) to follow. On logical fatalism and its early formulations in Aristotle and Diodorus Cronus, see (Gaskin 1995). For a modern formulation, see (Taylor 1968). For a recent and thorough treatment of theological fatalism, see (Zagzebski 1991). As for ‘ontological’ fatalism, it is—as far as I am aware—my own distinction. See below.

<sup>x</sup> For discussions of the relative merits of these two argument types, see (Diekemper 2004), (Gaskin 1995), (Sorabji 1980), and (Zagzebski 1991).

<sup>xi</sup> For analyses of these two different fatalistic argument types, see (Diekemper 2005a).

<sup>xii</sup> For the record, I share Markosian’s ambivalence about special relativity and its purported ramifications for the A-Theory (Markosian 2004, 73-5). For one possible way of reconciling special relativity with the A-Theory, see (Craig 2001). For another, see (Tooley 1997, 335-71). Of course, my ambivalence about special relativity is probably just as perplexing to a B-Theorist like Smart, as his ambivalence about common sense is to me. As Smart remarks elsewhere, ‘it may be the case that a “Heraclitean” will find things quite intelligible which are quite obscure to a “Parmenidean” like me’ (Smart 1980, 82-3).

<sup>xiii</sup> Mellor does not actually refer to the asymmetry in terms of fixity, but in terms of the modal characterization (temporal necessity/possibility) that I have been offering the B-Theorist.

<sup>xiv</sup> The contingency of the fixity I am referring to here should be read as broadly *logical*, not causal or deterministic, contingency.

<sup>xv</sup> This is the reason that I eschew the modal characterization of the asymmetry, since, if I am right, it is possible that the future be fixed in a way that threatens fatalism without it being fixed—or fixed in just that way—in all possible worlds. See (Diekemper 2004).

<sup>xvi</sup> See (Diekemper 2005b).

<sup>xvii</sup> (Sider 2001, 2ff.) also makes use of the analogy.

<sup>xviii</sup> For a description of these distinctions, see (Lewis 1976, 146).

<sup>xix</sup> Here I am rendering ‘fact’ simply as a ‘truth’ or a ‘true proposition’, and not as the more inclusive ‘state-of-affairs that makes a true proposition true’.

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<sup>xx</sup> For an interesting formulation of this kind of B-Theoretic response to the logical fatalist, see (Oaklander 1998). I should note that Oaklander's discussion of 'Metaphysical Fatalism' anticipates some aspects of the debate in the current work, though I regret that I did not have the benefit of having read his paper until after completing mine (Oaklander 1998, 195-201).

<sup>xxi</sup> The exceptions to this entailment claim are McCall's model, according to which becoming consists in the annihilation of future possible branches of time; and McTaggart's initial conception of time, from which he infers its unreality (McCall 1994) (McTaggart 1908). Both McCall and McTaggart acknowledge temporal becoming, but the ontological asymmetry that follows from it is not a robust one of existence. It is, rather, simply one of properties. For McCall, it is the actual/non-actual asymmetry, where this is determined by a multiplicity of future branches versus a singular past trunk. According to McTaggart's conception, it is simply that future events instantiate futurity, and past ones (trivially) don't. McTaggart's conception, it seems to me, provides the weakest A-Theoretic asymmetry. Notice that if my conclusions are correct, it is McTaggart's conception that most threatens to generate ontological fatalism; since it postulates an existent future *and* acknowledges objective temporal becoming. Inasmuch as McCall's ontological asymmetry is grounded in a multiplicity/singularity asymmetry, it seems to be insulated from such a charge.